Appendix M1. Cultural Context of the Delta Wetlands Project Islands

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PREHISTORY

The following discussion on the prehistory of the project area is based on Maniery and Syda (1989) and BioSystems Analysis (1993). For more detailed discussions of the prehistory and archaeology of the area, see Bennyhoff (1977), Cook and Elsasser (1956), Fredrickson (1974), Heizer (1949), and Moratto (1984).

In the Delta, one of the areas of greatest prehistoric sensitivity is where Piper soils are located. Piper soils represent relic sand hills that once stood above the level of the surrounding tule marshes. Because of their elevation above the frequently inundated peat soils, these sand mounds were often used by prehistoric peoples for village and burial sites.

Surface evidence of prehistoric sites in this setting is scarce because Piper soils are often covered with peat. As a result, most of the archaeological resources in the Delta have been found during plowing and leveling, during ditch construction, or after flooding. In addition to the two sites recorded on Holland Tract, only 14 sites have been identified in the vicinity of the Delta Wetlands (DW) project islands: 12 sites on Bethel Island and Hotchkiss Tract and two on Veale Tract. Many more sites probably exist on the islands than have been discovered to date.

The earliest recognized use of the Delta region dates from approximately 2500 B.C. to 1000 B.C. Evidence of this early occupation has been named the Early Horizon by archaeologists working in the region. Typical artifacts from this period include distinctive shell ornaments, finely made stone charmstones, large projectile points, baked clay (used for cooking), fishing implements, and grinding tools. Early Horizon burials in extended posture have been found in the lower levels of indurated Piper sand mounds.

Middle Horizon sites, dating from approximately 1000 B.C. to A.D. 500, have also been found in the Delta. Sites dating to this period often contain substantial living refuse (midden). Increased use of obsidian, shell, and bead assemblages is believed to indicate greater social complexity and stratification. Middle Horizon burials are found primarily in flexed positions.

The period between A.D. 500 and the arrival of the Spanish in central California has been termed the Late Horizon. This period is characterized by large village sites, increasing evidence of acorn and nut processing, the introduction and use of the bow and arrow, and the use of clam shell disc beads as the primary medium of exchange. During the last part of the period, cremation became a common mortuary practice.

ETHNOGRAPHY

The DW project area is situated at the interface of three different ethnolinguistic groups that used the region before European contact: the Plains Miwok, the Northern Valley Yokuts, and the Bay Miwok. Levy (1978) places Holland Tract within the boundaries of the Plains Miwok; however, settlement and territorial boundaries of the Plains Miwok have long been the subject of controversy in California ethnography. The dispute centers on the classification of some of the northernmost groups (Chulamni and Tawalimni) as Yokuts or Miwok (Merriam 1907). The best available evidence indicates that the Chulamni were Yokuts and the Tawalimni were Miwok (Barrett 1908; Bennyhoff 1977; Kroeber 1908, 1959, 1963). This boundary lies between the Calaveras and Mokelumne Rivers.

Bennyhoff attributes most of the controversy over Plains Miwok boundaries to early depopulation of the Delta due to missionization and dislocations that resulted from the Gold Rush. Bennyhoff used mission records and other historical documents to identify whether tribelets were Plains Miwok, Bay Miwok, or Northern Valley Yokuts. (Bennyhoff 1977.) Milliken (1982) noted that the territories of the ethnolinguistic groups that inhabited the area around Mt. Diablo cannot be precisely located. Unfortunately, the mid-valley/Delta groups were devas-

tated by missionization, disease, and the Gold Rush to the point that only scant records of their former cultures have been preserved, except for archaeological remains (Moratto 1984).

The tribelet was the largest political unit among the Miwok. The Plains Miwok had about 28 such divisions (Bennyhoff 1977). Within each tribelet were several more or less permanently inhabited settlements and a larger number of seasonal campsites (Levy 1978). The Yokuts had miniature tribes of approximately 300 people, with most of the members of a tribe congregated in one principal settlement with a headman.

Large multiple-family villages were situated on elevated terraces near streams. Most settlements were inhabited permanently, except during a period of several weeks each year during the fall acorn harvest. Acorns were a staple augmented by various seeds, nuts, roots, berries, and greens. Fishing was very important in both the Miwok and Northern Valley Yokuts economy. Tule rafts provided transportation across sloughs and streams. The Northern Valley Yokuts fashioned a wide range of essential tools and implements from stone, and basketry supplied a wide assortment of containers. A major industry among the Plains Miwok was the production of baked clay substitutes, which were traded for items made of stone, such as net weights, cooking stones, pipes, and crude vessels (Bennyhoff 1977, Levy 1978).

The Bay Miwok aboriginal population is estimated to have been about 1,700. The Plains Miwok are thought to have numbered about 11,000. The population density of the Plains Miwok was probably the highest of any group in aboriginal California, averaging over 10 persons per square mile (Baumhoff 1963). The size of the aboriginal population of the Northern Valley Yokuts cannot be determined from Spanish accounts; however, two estimates are 25,100 (Cook 1955a) and 31,404 (Baumhoff 1963). The native population was not evenly distributed but was clustered in a narrow strip of land bordering the San Joaquin River and its main tributaries (Wallace 1978).

After 1770, Indian populations were reduced and settlement patterns were disrupted in the Delta and San Joaquin Valley areas as a result of Spanish colonial expeditions and mission recruitment. More traumatic impacts on Central Valley populations resulted from the epidemics of 1833 and subsequent years; the disease (believed to be malaria) resulted in the decimation of about 75% of the Central Valley inhabitants by 1846 (Cook 1955a).

The bulk of information regarding the population of Northern Valley Yokuts and Bay and Plains Miwok derives from historical documents, particularly mission baptismal records (Merriam 1955, 1968) and accounts of military and religious expeditions (Cook 1955b, 1960). Milliken (1982, 1986) describes the early history of the project area and its environs after initial Spanish contact and before the American pioneer period. The Spanish first entered eastern Contra Costa County in 1772, when Pedro Fages led a small exploratory party into the Concord region over Willow Pass and into the West Pittsburg vicinity before returning to Monterey. In 1776, another party under the leadership of Juan de Anza camped near Concord then traveled through Antioch and the plains of eastern Contra Costa County toward Tracy, eventually turning westward to Monterey over the south Coast Ranges. Later the same year, Spaniards established an army garrison and mission in San Francisco.

According to Milliken (1986), between 1778 and 1806 the local Native American tribes of the Bay Area "were conquered and brought to Mission San Francisco". Between 1806 and 1811, several Spanish expeditions entered the San Joaquin Valley, visiting Native American communities along the waterways. Milliken states that the river-dwelling tribes of eastern Contra Costa County were taken to Mission San Jose between 1810 and 1812. He writes that "from that time until 1836, eastern Contra Costa County seems to have been virtually uninhabited."

The Bay Miwok were the first of the Eastern Miwok peoples to be missionized, with converts coming from the Saclan tribelet to Mission San Francisco in 1794 (Levy 1978). The Plains Miwok were also subject to missionization in the early part of the nineteenth century; converts from the westernmost Delta began appearing in baptismal records of Mission San Jose in 1811. From 1811 to 1834, over 2,100 Plains Miwok baptisms were recorded.

After the missions closed in 1834-1836, Plains Miwok became involved in agricultural work on the large land-grant ranchos that were established in this period. Today, few California Native Americans claim descent from these central California groups.

HISTORIC PERIOD

This discussion focuses on Bacon and Bouldin Islands and Webb Tract because they are the primary locations of historic-period resources (Maniery 1992, Maniery and Syda 1989).

Reclamation

Until the Gold Rush of the 1840s and 1850s, the Delta was a network of waterways and natural islands of sand and peat. The Swamp and Overflow Land Act of 1850 opened the Delta for speculation by land developers (Thompson and West 1879). Table M1-1 provides a summary of reclamation efforts on the four DW project islands.

Although land ownership of Delta islands and development of reclamation districts began in the 1850s, it was not until the late 1860s that massive efforts were initiated to reclaim the land for farming. The catalyst for reclamation was the completion of the transcontinental railroad over the Sierra Nevada, which freed hundreds of Chinese laborers for other tasks.

Bouldin Island was the first of the DW project islands to be reclaimed; it was sold to Baker and Company in 1871 (Thompson and West 1879). This group hired Chinese laborers to construct a levee around the island and plant crops. Initially, the venture appeared successful; however, by 1874, the levee was cracking and annual flooding resulted in the loss of crops (Paterson et al. 1978). Following this catastrophe, Baker and Company sold the land to the Pacific Distillery Company of San Francisco. Between 1877 and 1878, the Pacific Distillery Company spent over $250,000 on reclamation and levee construction, again using Chinese laborers. In 1878, the company had over 4,000 acres of crops in cultivation, primarily grains and potatoes. The success of the island agriculture continued into the 1880s; by 1886, the island was the principal source of potatoes for the San Francisco market (Paterson et al. 1978). Landings, piers, and wharves were constructed around the island before 1894 so the crops could be transported by barge (Compton 1894). Bouldin Island was used until 1904, when the levee at Central Landing broke, flooding the community with 15 feet of water. After breaks in the same place in 1906 and 1908, the island was abandoned until 1916 (Paterson et al. 1978).

The reclamation of Bouldin Island was perhaps one of the more successful endeavors in the region. Early attempts to reclaim Bacon Island and Webb Tract were not as successful. Between 1870 and 1872, Chinese laborers were used to build a levee system around Webb Tract. This system was lost during the winter of 1872-1873, and reclamation was not attempted again until the 20th century (Paterson et al. 1978, Thompson and West 1879).

Chinese laborers were also involved in levee construction on Bacon Island in 1872. The levee broke in June 1873, ruining the newly planted crops, and levee work began again (Paterson et al. 1978). Over the next 5 years, Henry Bacon tried many different methods of levee construction, using a variety of materials. These attempts were all ultimately unsuccessful; levees continued to sink into the river because of instability of the peat soils and resultant cracks, and the island flooded regularly into the early 1900s (Paterson et al. 1978).

The invention of clamshell, hydraulic, and steam-driven dredges in the late 1800s was ultimately responsible for the successful reclamation of the Delta islands. Dredges allowed for levees to be constructed using river bottom sediment instead of the unstable peat soil, eliminating the problems of extensive cracking and disintegration. Additionally, levees were more resistant to sinkage problems. Success of the levees, however, called for constant maintenance on the part of the landowners (Paterson et al. 1978).

Initial construction costs, reclamation expenses, and constant maintenance needed for success required substantial resources of financial capital, consolidated ownership of large tracts of land, and engineering experience. The final reclamation of Bacon and Bouldin Islands and Webb Tract began as a cooperative venture between three men: Phillips, Cochran, and Rindge. Based in Los Angeles, these men began buying large tracts of land in the Delta in 1902 and set up small, separate companies specifically to purchase and reclaim individual tracts of land (e.g., Webb Land Company). By 1912, Phillips had formed his own company, merging many of the smaller ones into the California Delta Farms Company. This company was responsible for constructing a levee system around Webb Tract in 1912 and Bacon Island in 1915 (Paterson et al. 1978).

Holland Tract was reclaimed in 1910 by the Holland Land and Water Company. This company was a division of Delta Farms, which reclaimed both Webb Tract and Bacon Island.

Phillips had an arrangement with George Shima, a Japanese-born farmer who leased land and worked in the Delta. California Delta Farms obtained unreclaimed land and built the levee systems, then leased the holdings to Shima for reclamation and farming purposes. Through this arrangement, Shima reclaimed Webb, Holland, Orwood, Empire, McDonald, Shima, Bishop, Cohn, and Henning Tracts and King, Medford, Mandeville, and Bacon Islands. Between 1889 and 1913, he reclaimed about 29,000 acres. Shima is credited with reclaiming a

total of 102,000 acres throughout the state; 62,000 of these were located in the Delta (Byron Times 1912, Fujita 1980).

Agriculture

The initiation of reclamation of Bouldin Island in the 1870s brought recognition of the richness of the peat soils and their value for agricultural purposes. Reclamation efforts went hand in hand with extensive construction of ditch systems and pump stations around the islands as a means of draining water, leading to even more acres being planted in crops. Agriculture on Bouldin Island was successful in the 1880s and grew in importance into the 1900s.

The first attempts to commercially grow asparagus were made on Bouldin Island in 1892, and the venture led to the fame of the Delta as the "asparagus capital" of the world. Asparagus, potatoes, beans, and grains were the primary crops grown on the islands before 1900 (Chan 1986). In 1910, farming on the islands focused on potatoes and onions (Sierra Art and Engineering Company 1910).

In the 1880s and early 1890s, most farming was conducted by Chinese laborers. Often, Chinese laborers stayed on to farm after completing the levee system. Other times the landowner leased land to one Chinese person, who then brought in his countrymen to farm (Chan 1986). Chinese laborers were working on Bouldin Island in 1882 and were farming over one-quarter of Bacon Island between 1910 and 1919. After that period, their involvement rapidly died out (Chan 1986).

By the late 1890s, Japanese immigrants were steadily arriving in America, joining the Chinese work force. They were aided in their endeavor to find work by George Shima, a fellow immigrant who arrived in America in 1889 and began working as a laborer at a potato farm along the coast (Fujita 1980, Hata and Hata 1986). By 1894, Shima had begun to experiment with potato growing in the Delta on land he leased at Staten Island. Despite financial setbacks in 1895 when floods destroyed his crop, he continued to buy and lease land in the Delta. By 1909, Shima was known as the Potato King, a man who was credited with establishing the reputation of the Delta as a prime agricultural region. A true entrepreneur, he was the first to realize that using appealing packaging methods when shipping his product would aid in marketing. Red bags marked "Shima Fancy" were used to package and ship his potatoes and became his trademark between 1910 and 1926 (Yoshimura 1981).

As early as 1900, Delta farmers devised a series of camps to facilitate cultivation of vast fields on the islands, and Shima's holdings were no exception. Typically, an island was divided into tracts of land, varying in size from 100 acres to 500 acres. A labor camp was located on one of the parcels and was usually built at the base of the levee near a wharf. Each camp was responsible for a tract of land, with different crops often grown on each tract.

The camps functioned as autonomous units. Each had its own housing, cooking facilities, barn, sheds, horses, and farm implements. In addition, large warehouses, used for packing, storing, and processing crops, were located on tops of levees near the landing or wharf. This allowed crops to be easily transported by barge or boat from the camp. A foreman was in charge of all the laborers and the cook and stable groom assigned to a camp. The foreman, cook, and groom were often the only people who remained at the camp during the off season (Chan 1986, Paterson et al. 1978).

Initially, these camps were constructed to house Chinese American workers. By 1910, however, the majority of the camps constructed in the Delta were built by Shima for use during his farming ventures. Shima's camps were similar to those throughout the Delta; a camp was built for every 400-500 acres of land and included a place to live, a mess hall/kitchen, and a barn. Often, a shower house and bathroom house were provided as well. Every two or three camps on an island had an office (Fujita 1980).

Shima maintained a stable work force, arranging his reclamation efforts and farming activities so that he could keep men employed all year (Paterson et al. 1978). By 1913, he was considered the wealthiest Japanese man in California, operating a fleet of river barges and boats used to haul his crops to markets. He also employed hundreds of Japanese, Chinese, and East Indian workers (Hata and Hata 1986). Shima created conditions favorable to the transition of the Japanese from wage earners to tenant farmers by frequently subleasing his holdings, both land and camps, to other Japanese farmers (Hata and Hata 1986).

By 1917, Shima had 17 camps on Webb Tract, 12 on Holland Tract, and 12 on Bacon Island, as well as headquarters on Webb Tract and Bacon Island (Widdows 1917). Shima operated the camps under a lease with the California Delta Farms Company, of which he was a

shareholder. Additionally, Shima maintained a residence at camp no. 1 on Bacon Island, and his headquarters for the Delta was located in camp no. 3 on Bacon Island (Fujita 1980). Following reclamation of Bouldin Island in 1918, 37 camps were also built around the perimeter of that island (Budd and Widdows 1926).

As with other foreign-born farmers in the Delta, Shima began having trouble leasing land after 1919. The passage of the Alien Land Act in 1913, followed by the amendment to the Alien Land Act in 1919, resulted in many Asian tenant farmers leaving the Delta. The laws made it difficult for Asians to lease land. In the 1920s, Webb Tract was liquidated by California Delta Farms, subdivided, and sold as small-acreage farms to non-Asian owners. Bouldin Island also suffered this fate. Shima found ways to partially circumvent the statutes, however, and continued to farm on Bacon Island until his death in 1926 (Hata and Hata 1986). By 1938, Shima's widow had sold his holdings in the Delta, allowed the leases to expire, and moved out of California (Fujita 1980, Hata and Hata 1986).

Japanese continued to work in the Delta as laborers until the outbreak of World War II, when they were removed from the region and interned. After the war, some returned to the Delta, but their number was low compared with the "small army" employed by Shima at his peak. Today, some tracts on Bacon Island continue to be farmed by Japanese Americans, maintaining the tradition started by Shima. Over half the island is leased or owned and farmed by Japanese Americans, using Mexican laborers (Hata and Hata 1986, San Joaquin County 1992).

Today, Bacon and Bouldin Islands and Webb Tract are still used primarily for agricultural pursuits. Portions of Holland and Webb Tracts and Bouldin Island are used for grazing sheep and cattle. Hunting clubs and two marinas exist on Holland Tract.

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Personal Communications

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Table M1-1. Summary of Reclamation Efforts on Delta Wetlands Islands

Island/Tract	Early Reclamation Effort (Date and Company)	Final Reclamation (Date and Company)	Tenant/Farmer	Reclamation District/ Organization Date	Major Known Floods
Bacon Island	1872-1877 Bacon, Day, and Hastings (later Bacon Land and Loan Company)	1915 California Delta Farms	Shima (1915-1936+)	2028/1918	1873, 1879, 1907-1910
Bouldin Island	1871-1874 Steven, Baker & Co. Pacific Distillery Company	1916-1918 California Delta Farms	Shima (ca. 1904-1910)	22/1861 756/1904, 1918	1874, 1904, 1906, 1907, 1908-1916
Holland Tract	1910 Holland Land and Water Company (division of California Delta Farms)	1910 Holland Land and Water Company	Shima (ca. 1910-1919)	2025/1918	1980
Webb Tract	1870-1872 (company unknown)	ca. 1912 Webb Land Company (division of California Delta Farms)	Shima (ca. 1910-1919)	2026/1918	1872-1873, 1934, 1950, 1980

Source: Paterson et al. 1978; San Joaquin and Contra Costa County Reclamation Records n.d.